

BATS



Bats are nocturnal (*night*) animals that live in dark, quiet places. There are over 2,000 species of bats worldwide, with 26 common to California. With the exception of one nectar-feeding species, all California bats feed on insects, and most prefer to roost in tree foliage and cavities, under loose bark and in caves and crevices. Only five species of California bats are known to roost in buildings.

Bats are the only known mammals capable of true sustained flight. Their front legs and long fingers are supported by a web structure which includes their hind legs to form wings. Their wingspan may be from 6 inches to over 5 feet.



HABITS AND DAMAGE

Bats are often found feeding over a pond or stream, along the edge of a forest or beside a cliff, where night-flying insects are likely to be concentrated. Although bats do have small eyes, they find their prey best by using their keen sense of hearing. As they fly, bats produce a cry which is too high-pitched for people to hear. The sound bounces off solid objects so the bat can detect insects, natural enemies or barriers. They are able to consume 500 to 600 insects per hour using this "radar-like" system.

Bats usually only produce one offspring at a time. Females give birth to their young in early summer and usually carry them until they become too heavy. They

are then left to roost until they learn to fly (*by mid-August*). Bats have been known to live as long as 20 years.

Some may live in colonies or groups, but many prefer to live alone. Hibernating bats usually roost in clusters and where water is nearby.

Bats are generally beneficial, but can become a problem when they roost in buildings. Although bats may appear aggressive toward people, deliberate attacks are rare. Most bites result from trying to handle sick animals.

SIGNS OF ACTIVITY

- Accumulation of bat droppings
(which can easily be crushed into fine fragments)
- High-pitched squeeking, rustling
- Odor
- Discoloration around small openings (1/4 -3/8")
- Bat sightings at or near dusk
- Insect pieces left behind

CONTROL

The only permanent way to get rid of bats is to prevent their entry. All openings larger than 1/4 inch must be eliminated. Hardware cloth or sheet metal may be used for large openings; oakum or steel wool may be used for cracks. Steel wool is effective for stopping openings in tile roofs. Check for openings in louvers, vents, cornices, warped siding and roof eaves. It is best

to seal all but one or two primary entries. Wait several days and make the final closures about one-half hour after dark when all of the bats have emerged. Bat-proofing while bats are present should be avoided in early to mid-summer because young bats may be shut inside. There are no repellents or poisons registered for the control of bats in California.

BATS AND RABIES

Bats are often a concern because they have been known to transmit rabies. In Southern California, including San Bernardino County, bats are the main reservoirs of wildlife rabies (*as opposed to skunks in Northern and Central California*).

Typical symptoms of rabies in bats are erratic flights, daytime exposure in the open or symptoms of weakness or

paralysis, which cause bats to lose their power of flight and fall to the ground. Fallen bats are frequently dead, but in many instances they are still alive. Not all bats found on the ground and unable to fly are rabid.

Nevertheless, ***do not attempt to handle bats because they will attempt to bite if they feel threatened. Anyone bitten by a bat should immediately seek medical attention.***



County of San Bernardino • Department of Public Health
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

VECTOR CONTROL PROGRAM

2355 East Fifth Street
San Bernardino, CA 92410
(909) 388-4600 • (800) 442-2283

Visit our web site: www.sbcounty.gov/dehs